



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## EVOLUTION AND THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Not least fruitful among the results of the present-day teaching of Evolution are those which flow from the application of this great principle to the study of creed and dogma. Creed becomes to us in these modern days a living thing inasmuch and in so far as creed is seen to have grown; to have passed through a process of historical development. The frank and explicit recognition of this principle in its application to the Church's Creed is a thing of comparatively recent date. In Tertullian's work *On Prescription; against the Heretics*, novelty is regarded as the hall-mark of error; while orthodoxy is that which has been held and handed down unchanged from the beginning. The Fathers at Nicaea, in A.D. 325, maintained that they were introducing nothing new; they were simply restating that which had always been held and taught in the Church. The Arians, on the contrary, maintained that the Council in adopting and imposing upon the consciences of Christians the term "homousios" (consubstantial) *was* introducing something new. Doctrinal novelty was the thing which Arians and Orthodox alike professed to repudiate. At each doctrinal crisis in the long history of the Church, those who were in fact leading the party of progress have sheltered themselves under the plea that they were but re-asserting that which had been held and taught by the Apostolic and primitive Church. So Luther cites passages from the Fathers in support of his thesis of justification "by faith only." But to restate means to interpret; and interpretation always and necessarily involves the admixture of somewhat of the mind, of the personality of the interpreter, as well as of the thought of the age and the environment in which he lives. It is impossible for us in this twentieth century to confine ourselves to the modes of thought or the forms of expression which prevailed in the fourth or the sixteenth century, and at the same time to speak with the living accents of spontaneous conviction. Jacob

may have donned the garments of another; the voice in its tone and cadence was his own.

The late M. Auguste Sabatier maintained that whenever a dogma had become established, through that very process of becoming established it ceased to live; inasmuch as life is incompatible with rigid fixity. Only that which possesses movement lives; and movement necessarily implies change. This thesis of Sabatier's, though stimulating and suggestive, is, in our judgment, not wholly sound. In the mind of Sabatier, to transcend means to cast aside; to reject. The "religion of the Spirit" recognizes no objective "authority." Dogma, *i. e.*, in its living relation to faith, exists only while it is in the making; once made, it has by that very fact ceased to live. Is there not a confusion of thought here? Are not process and product related as means and end? To what purpose should the Church have labored and travailed in the process of shaping the dogma if the dogma were destined to die in the moment of its birth; if its very formation were to be its destruction?

But is it not a radical error to suppose that to transcend necessarily means to discard? This error is a widely prevalent one. It has lain at the root of so many well-meant movements of reform; thereby seriously weakening and retarding them. True progress must be at the same time both radical and conservative. It must be conservative in holding fast to all the gains and achievements of the past; it is radical in that it takes up a stand-point in advance of the past; from which, in the survey and retrospect, "all things" are now found to have become "new." All is seen in a new light, because all is now construed by means of a new principle. An illustration of this is seen in St. Paul's attitude towards the conception of 'law' as compared with that of the Pharisees, or even with that of the original disciples of our Lord. When we say "a new principle" we do not mean, of course, that the truth was new in itself, as though it had just sprung into existence; but that it was (or is) new in its apprehension and mode of application. It is safe to say that no one in the first ages of the Church had laid hold upon the great truth of justification by faith in precisely Luther's sense; just as no one in that early period had apprehended, or

could have apprehended, the Atonement after the manner of St. Anselm.

The true relation of Faith to Dogma, we are persuaded, is to be expressed as follows: Faith while transcending dogma is at the same time immanent in dogma. While at home in the Creed, as Abraham in his tent, there are times when faith is Divinely moved, as was Abraham, to go "forth abroad, and look toward heaven, and tell the stars, if it be able to tell them." This does not mean the forsaking of creed; it does not mean disloyalty to dogma as such; it simply means the recognition of the human limitations which attach to creed, so far as it is a human product. Creed fulfills its function as 'law' or 'rule of faith' only in so far as it points and leads us beyond itself to Him of whom it bears witness; in so far it helps our faith to rest upon that Divine Person who alone is the ultimate and proper object of religious faith. Faith is larger than creed, inasmuch as faith is the immediate response to Divine Revelation; and Revelation—God's Word to us,—is greater than creed,—our word to Him. In all this we do not fail to recognize in creed the element of Divine truth, and therefore of perennial authority; for creed is one of the forms in which Divine truth is mediated to the individual. Creed is the voice of the Church; and the Church is a Society Divinely founded, Divinely enlightened, and Divinely guided—"the pillar and ground of the truth." At the same time, it is a fact of history than which none is plainer or more outstanding, that every movement of doctrinal or of practical progress in the Church has been due to the initiative of some great individual, some prophetically-endowed leader, raised up by the Lord to go before His people, to point the way, and to show them how to follow. Such a man in the Apostolic age was St. Paul; such a man three centuries later was St. Athanasius; and in more modern days such a man (despite all his limitations) was Luther.

As was said at the beginning of this paper, we are coming in these days to recognize more clearly and fully the evidences and tokens of gradual development in the history of the creeds. For example, we are now able as never before to point out several successive stages in the process of evolution in regard to

such a fundamental dogma as that of the Holy Trinity. Broadly speaking, the three great creeds known as the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian are monuments of successive stages of development in the setting forth of this fundamental truth of Christianity. This does not, of course, mean that either a strict chronological sequence or an absolute historical dependence can be made out in the case of these creeds; for the Apostles' in its present form is without doubt the latest of the three; but for relative simplicity of statement, as well as in regard to the specific doctrinal view-point of each one of these creeds taken severally, the above-mentioned order is the natural and logical one. For it is a fact probably not generally understood or realized that each one of these creeds has its own individual point of view and sequence of thought,—what we may venture to call its doctrinal “tropus.”<sup>1</sup> Or to use another expression which has come to be frequently employed since Hegel's time,—each one of the “three Creeds” may be said to present the truth of the Holy Trinity under a certain “aspect.” It follows that the doctrinal view and teaching of each of the Creeds is integral in itself and relatively distinct from that of the other two; in much the same way as New Testament criticism has taught us to recognize the distinctive view-point of each of the four Evangelists in the setting forth of his own account of the Gospel facts. This does not mean that the Creeds, any more than the Gospels, necessarily contradict one another; it rather means that they supplement each other; and thus they all combine to give us a completer and more perfect view of the truth than could any one of them when taken by itself alone.

The Apostles' Creed lays the primary emphasis upon our Lord's Humanity. He is no abstractly Divine Personality, but the Son of Man who is at the same time the Son of God,—“conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary.” The Holy Ghost, again, is not defined, or even described in the Apostles' Creed; He is simply confessed.

When we come to the Nicene Creed, we have definition

---

<sup>1</sup> The Greek *τρόπος* = method, manner, character; the root-meaning being “turn;” as we say, ‘turn of mind;’ a ‘turn’ for study; a mechanical or a practical ‘turn.’

applied to the Second Person,— He is said to be “consubstantial” with the Father; which means that the very same definition of Godhead which is applicable to the Father is applicable also to the Son. For, as St. Athanasius says, “there is but one kind (or species) of Divinity, which is also in the Logos.” (ἐν γὰρ εἶδος θεότητος, ὅπερ ἐστὶ καὶ ἐν τῷ Λόγῳ).<sup>2</sup> The personal Divine Name “God” (θεός) is given to the Son, but attributively rather than substantively or subjectively. As the Son, He is also ‘God.’ As Son, He owes to the Father all that He is; all that He possesses. The subordination of the Son to the Father is an essential element in the Nicene conception, by which it is determined throughout. Here is no contradiction or confusion of thought, Harnack to the contrary notwithstanding. For the ‘essence’ or ‘being’ of the Son is not said to be numerically identical with the ‘essence’ or ‘being’ of the Father (which would break down the distinction between Father and Son) but the one is said to be God ‘from’ or ‘out of’ God; ‘that is, out of the essence of the Father.’ In Origen’s metaphorical phrase, the Son is ‘second God.’ The unity of the Godhead is guaranteed by the fact that the Father is “the one God” (in the Greek ὁ θεός, “God” with the definite article prefixed). Again, in the successive forms of the ‘Nicene’ Creed, the Holy Ghost is first simply confessed (Creed of A.D. 325); then He is characterized by certain epithets (A.D. 381) of which the exact force in the original is obscured in the English translation;<sup>3</sup> but it is not until we reach the Western form of the ‘Nicene’ Creed that the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son, as well as from the Father, is declared. And finally, it is only the so-called “Athanasian” Creed which gives explicit expression to the *personality* of the Holy Ghost, by distinctly and unreservedly applying to Him the Name of “God” in the absolute sense. And what applies to the Third Person in the “Athanasian” Creed applies of course also to the Second. He, too, is called God’ in the absolute sense of the Name Jehovah. He is, equally with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the Self-existent One.

---

<sup>2</sup> Third Oration against the Arians, § 15.

<sup>3</sup> The word translated “Lord,” for example, is in the Greek not a name, but a descriptive adjective.

"And in this Trinity there is no 'before' or 'after' no 'greater' or 'less'; (in hac Trinitate nihil prius aut posterius, nihil majus aut minus)". The subordination-teaching of the Nicene Creed has now disappeared. The Latin knows no distinction between the Name 'God' with and without the definite article, and accordingly this distinction largely disappears from Western thought. The Father is now no longer seen as the representative and guardian of the Divine unity; this function belongs to the Second and to the Third Divine "Person" equally with Him. It is the Trinity which is the 'one God.' Now for the first time the terms "Trinity" and "Person" make their appearance in the Creed; while of the distinctive Nicene term "consubstantial" there is no mention. All thought of "relative" Godhead is excluded in the *distinctive* portion of the "Athanasian" Creed<sup>4</sup> (clauses 1-19); while at the same time connection is made (in clauses 20-23) with the previous Nicene development. But the characteristics in which the Three Divine Persons *agree* are stressed so much more strongly than those which are peculiar or proper to Each of Them singly, that we need not be surprised to find the Schoolmen, some centuries later, anxiously debating the question—Why it was more fitting than the Second Person in the Trinity should become incarnate, rather than the First or the Third? And when we come down in the Western and Augustinian development to the period<sup>5</sup> of New England Calvinistic Trinitarianism, we find that in many writers the theological conception of "generation" has largely ceased to have any vitality, as applied to the Second Person in the Trinity; resulting in a very close approach to Tritheism on the one hand, or on the other, to Sabellianism, in the thought of many of the "orthodox" Puritans.

---

<sup>4</sup>It is hardly necessary to say that the so-called "Athanasian" Creed has no historical connection with the saint whose name it bears. It is a Western Creed, emanating from the school of St. Augustine, and now attributed with considerable probability to Cæsarius, Bishop of Arles from A. D. 503 to 543.

<sup>5</sup>In order that we may trace the evolutionary progress in the doctrinal definition of our Lord's Person from the stage of His Divine Sonship and unity of essence with the Father to that of His proper and personal Godhead, we must learn to apprehend the 'Nicene' teaching in its distinctive and individual character. We must guard against the error into which one

Summing up the teaching of these three great Creeds as to our Lord's Person,—the Apostles' sets before us our Lord in His Humanity; the Nicene emphasizes His Divinity; while the "Athanasian" declares His absolute Deity. Thus the historical evolution of Trinitarian and Christological doctrine is seen as a process both logical and necessary. For the right understanding of this development it is essential that we do not confine ourselves to the study of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, to the exclusion of the "Athanasian;" otherwise we shall be reading back into the earlier forms of statement conceptions which are peculiar to the later—a proceeding fatal to historical accuracy and truth. These creeds are on the one hand misunderstood as though their respective Trinitarian statements were inconsistent with each other; on the other side they are misunderstood hardly less seriously when the individual doctrinal characteristics of each are ignored, and they are regarded as simply coincident statements of the truth. These statements are, in fact, neither contradictory nor are they merely tautologous. It surely appears Providential that the Church is not confined to one single creedal statement, just as she possesses not one but several Evangelic accounts of our Saviour's Person and ministry. If any one of these creeds be taken in isolation from the others, there is a real danger lest we run into an erroneous, because a one-sided view of our Lord's Person; and so come to think of Him either simply as the Eternal Son, the preëxistent Christ; or, again, simply as 'God,' as though He were but a manifestation or 'aspect' of the Father.

In view of all this long historical process, must not one be blind indeed who should fail to see the essential bearing of the evolutionary principle upon the creed of the Church, or the light which it sheds upon the history of dogma? It is, we are

---

so easily falls of unconsciously reading back into 'Nicene' statements the distinctive conceptions of that later Augustinian theology of which the so-called 'Athanasian' Creed is a characteristic product. It is no easy matter, at this distance of time to disentangle the doctrinal threads, and to assign the several theological statements to their proper categories. A circumstance which renders this task the more difficult is the use of the term 'Athanasian' to designate a formula which did not emanate from the East at all, and which is not in historical or logical dependence upon that Origenist or Alexandrian school of which both Athanasius and Arius were products.



persuaded, a mistake to think, as so many do, that if evolution be recognized as a fact, then Christian doctrine has ceased for us to possess any objective validity. So far is this from being the necessary result of the application of the principle of evolution to the Church's Creed, that it is this principle alone, when rightly understood and applied, that will lead us in these modern days to a just appreciation of dogma, through enabling us to trace the successive stages of its gradual unfolding. Thus we may, if we will, perceive the validity and value which belong to the dogma in all and each one of the stages of its development. It is not that the later doctrinal statements rescind and set aside the earlier, or that if the earlier be true, the later are superfluous. Rather is it the case that the earlier and the later alike mutually supplement and complete each other, in much the same way as the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel according to St. John mutually supplement each other in depicting the Evangelic portrait of our Lord. It is the change in emphasis and point of view which, while modifying our conceptions, enlarges and enriches them, and thus makes them fresh and living. And in the newer utterance the old still lives; nay, more, in the sphere of dogma the new, as a rule, even explicitly re-affirms the old.<sup>6</sup> And thus the permanence and stability of the Church as teacher of the nations is conserved, while at the same time the great law and fact of growth is recognized and vindicated. As has been often said, the truth of God is eternal and infinite; but human apprehension of the truth is finite and progressive, ever advancing from less to more, ever progressing from lower to higher. And so is fulfilled our Lord's promise to His Church,—“When He (the Spirit of the truth) is come, He shall guide you into all the truth.” But now, as says the Apostle, “we know in part, and we prophesy in part.” And so, in the Divine Providence, it shall ever be, until the day when, “that which is perfect” having “come, that which is in part shall be done away.”

WILLIAM S. BISHOP.

The University of the South.

---

<sup>6</sup>This statement finds abundant illustration in the history of the various forms of creeds, both Eastern and Western. See, for example, Hahn's *Bibliothek der Symbole*. Its application to the various forms of the “Nicene” and to the “Athanasian” Creed, is implied in what has been shown in the present paper.